

**Proceedings of Public Health Services Research Meeting**  
**May 9 - 10, 2001**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

**BACKGROUND**

A continuing concern of several in the public health community is the issue of inadequate research focusing on the infrastructure of public health, characterized by some as "Public Health Services Research." While much attention has focused on research on the sickness care system, there has not been a focus on research to improve the delivery of public health services. Recently a group discussing the science of public health performance issues raised this issue. In response, CDC's Extramural Prevention Research Program, located in the Public Health Practice Program Office, hosted a preliminary meeting of invited experts to develop a research agenda for use by the public health services community and for consideration as research priorities for the Program. The draft research priorities are listed below.

**Draft Public Health Services/Systems Research Agenda**

1. How is the public health system defined?
  1. Define a unit of service, particularly at the local level. What makes a local public health system?
  2. Develop a descriptive model of public health units. Is there a typology that can be used to classify the health units together and be used to do research on those units' outcomes? The model should include financing and administrative structure, and how the model is influenced by relationships of local and state agencies.
  3. Describe the infrastructure of public health units (financial, organizational structure, staffing, leadership).
  4. How do public health governmental units relate to the non-governmental public health system units?
2. What is the effect of public health infrastructure and processes on the delivery of public health interventions or outputs?
3. What contribution do public health interventions/outputs make to health outcomes?
  1. What is the role of policies or laws (interventions) on public health outcomes?
4. How best do we use existing health services management tools and research methods to improve public health services and public health outcomes?

**MEETING SUMMARY**

**Welcome:** F. Douglas Scutchfield, MD  
Edward L. Baker, MD, MPH

**Public Health Services Research: Panel Presentation**

Barney Turnock, MD, MPH, noted as a major problem a lack of consensus on frameworks to examine public health systems, a lack of funding, and a lack of interest and

experienced researchers. He then described a conceptual framework for the public health system as a basis for measuring public health system performance.

Paul Halverson, DrPH, MHS, reported that his work on performance standards focuses on indicators of organizational effectiveness, systems analysis, and outcomes research, and easily could apply to public health services research agenda.

Jeff Harris, MD, MPH, reported that his prevention research work focuses on smoking, colorectal cancer screening, digital screening, chlamydia screening, and use of pneumococcal vaccine in adult coverage 6 5.

### **Relevant Research Agendas: Panel Presentation**

Dixie Snider, MD, MPH, noted that prior to 1999, CDC research focused on specific diseases. By December 1999, each CDC CIO developed its own research agenda, and a CDC wider research agenda in preparation.

Ron Bialek, MMP, reported that the Council on Linkages between Academia and Public Health seeks to improve public health practice and education by implementing recommendations of the Public Health Faculty/Agency Forum, which establish links between academia and community public health agencies. Research questions are developed which related directly to the ten essential public health services.

Mary Lerchen, DrPH, MS, indicated that in 2002, PHPPO's Extramural Prevention Research Program (formerly the Prevention Research Initiative in EPO) will fund approximately 25 new prevention research awards to academic institutions/public health practitioner partners. Dr. Lerchen indicated that the goal of the current meeting is to support the public health services community in developing research priorities, some of which may be relevant for the FY2002 program announcement for investigator-initiated research.

### **Lessons Learned from Health Services Research Done on the Sick Care System and their Applicability to Public Health Services Research**

David Helms, PhD, described the mission and functions of the Academy for Health Services Research and Health Policy and defined health services research. He also discussed lessons learned in using health services research to inform policy and practice and shared some preliminary thoughts on how it can contribute to improving public health.

### **Practitioner Views of Needed Research: Panel Presentation**

Donald Williamson, MD, suggested the following research needs:

1. How is the public health system defined/described?
  1. What is the unit of service? e.g., capacity may be shared over broad regions.
  2. Develop a descriptive model that describes public health units.
2. What data exist to relate outcomes to existing public health units?
3. What data exist or should be developed to describe/define critical mass versus excess capacity for staffing or services?
4. How do we in public health move public policy?

5. What are real trigger points for problems facing public health? e.g., trends in disease occurrence driven by other than funding amounts.

Research needs proposed by Patrick J. Meehan, MD, were:

1. What works and what doesn't work?
2. What is the best structure for the public health workforce?
3. What are the best methods for retraining the public health workforce?
4. What are ways to improve information technology in public health?
5. Develop a user liaison model to look at research and sharing best practices.

Stephanie Bailey, MD, MSHSA, noted that competencies, structure, and content are important issues.

### **Charge to Breakout Groups**

The participants broke into two groups which were recharged by Dr. Skutchfield to address the public health services research agenda. The key questions to be answered by the groups were:

1. What are the major research areas that need to be addressed?
2. What are the major questions that need to be asked?
3. What priorities should the research areas have?
4. Who do we partner with in conducting this research--practitioners, funders, organizations and agencies?
5. Does the public health services research capacity exist in our universities, and how can we develop the capacity?

### **Next Steps for Refining and Implementing Research Agenda**

6. Pursue funding to allow special interest group for Public Health Services Research to meet prior to the next annual meeting of the Academy for Health Services Research and Health Policy.
7. Work with Ron Bialek to set aside time at APHA in October in Atlanta to review the proposed research agenda.
8. Mary Lerchen will provide the health services/systems draft research agenda to the Excellence in Science Committee, asking that at least one item from this listing be added to the proposed agenda for Extramural Prevention Research Program FY2002 awards.